GOVERNMENT OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Speech from the Throne

Building Our Future Together

The New Newfoundland and Labrador

March 19, 2003

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Delivered at the Opening of
The Fifth Session of The Forty-Fourth
General Assembly of the
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador
on Wednesday, March 19, 2003

by His Honour
The Honourable Edward Roberts, QC
Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador

Mr. Speaker, Members of the House of Assembly and People of Newfoundland and Labrador:

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Fifth Session of this, the 44th General Assembly. It is an honour for me to deliver my first Speech from the Throne in the people's chamber. And it is an honour for me to serve the people of this great province as your Lieutenant Governor.

Strength of Our People

In the few short months I have held this office, the many people I have met have confirmed for me that the true richness, the strong character and the distinctiveness that defines and embraces our province, is rooted in its people.

I saw it in the people of Badger when I visited that community a few weeks ago. The ability of our people to immediately band together to comfort, console and begin the arduous task of rebuilding was clearly evident. The response of the entire province confirmed what we all know about the strength of our people.

I recall, in particular, the efforts of Joe Roberts, a former fire chief in Badger, whose leadership and compassion exemplifies the extraordinary work and spirit of those dealing with the devastation in that community. My Government assures the people of Badger that it will continue to work with them as they rebuild their lives.

As in Badger, the resolve and faith of the people of Musgrave Harbour was tested by the tragic loss of five lives from their community. Once again, we saw the strength of community and the solidarity of our people when faced with such a terrible tragedy. Draper Fahey, Roger Hann and Darren, Danny and Irving Faulkner will be remembered as sons of our province whose lives typified our collective character formed by the sea and rock.

Lieutenant Governor's Recognition Awards

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians continue to excel in every conceivable walk of life. Such excellence deserves recognition; such achievement demands celebration. As the Queen's representative in this province, I will ensure that citizens who make a difference are recognized through the Lieutenant Governor's Recognition Awards.

These Awards will be a high honour, and they will be a true honour. They will mark the achievements of those whom we know well and others, while not being household names, who make no less of a difference. The Awards will be a public tribute by the Crown to mark high achievement by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Reflecting Our Values

My Government strives to reflect the nature of its people. My Government shares the everyday goals, desires and aspirations of the people of the province.

My Government has set a course to be open and accountable to all people. A government must be in touch with the priorities of all it seeks to serve. By being open, My Government welcomes the views and criticisms of each citizen. It is a government of inclusion, not exclusion.

A Government with a Plan

The hallmark of My Government is a commitment to a plan; a plan that sees a healthy, well educated people prepared to control their own destiny by seizing the opportunities that are now before them. This can occur when clear goals are established, agendas are set and commitments are delivered.

My Government reaffirms today its commitment to a long-term and consistent approach to strategic planning.

A Focused and Realistic Plan

Our plan is compelling and focused. It is not grandiose and unrealistic.
My Government strives for:

- ✓ Excellent education for our children.
- ✓ Quality and accessible health care.
- ✓ Jobs to provide for our families.
- ✓ More money in the hands of our people to spend, save and invest.
- ✓ Transportation and technology networks that conquer our geography.
- ✓ A true and equal partnership in the Canadian union.

These are some of the real benefits for people which My Government plans to achieve.

A Much Better Place

The outlook for our province just over 10 years ago loomed like a red sky in morning. The Northern cod fishery collapsed. Spending was not controlled. The province had an archaic fiscal, regulatory and tax environment. Taxes were too high. We did not have Hibernia, Terra Nova or White Rose. Voisey's Bay had yet to be discovered. Many of our people did not have a reason to stay.

Setting Our House in Order

Yet, together, we have persevered. To set our house in order, My Government saw the need for a strong commitment to planning that would guide us. My Government developed a Strategic Economic Plan in 1992, and in 1998 launched its Strategic Social Plan. As a result, we are in a much better place than a decade ago, a much better province than just two years ago. A new Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our province is now growing. The economy has become much more diversified. More people are working than ever before. The trend line for all economic indicators is moving in the right direction. Social assistance caseloads have declined. Out-migration is slowing significantly. More people are moving to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Between July 2001 and July 2002, just under 12,000 people moved into the province, the highest number since 1975. For the same period, net out-migration was 2,500 which was the lowest number in 10 years. We welcome these people to our province, particularly the thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have returned home.

Along with the commitment to an economic plan, My Government has embarked on an aggressive social plan. My Government had the courage to reform our school system, undertake health care reform, and redesign our system of social assistance. We will continue to work towards the creation of a more just society for all our people.

Our Destiny

My Government believes that it is the hard-working and dedicated people of this province who have turned it around. We will not return to a time when economic and social indicators consistently pointed in the wrong direction.

With a determined and calculated focus, My Government has set a course for a red sky at night. Our province is on the verge of a new Newfoundland and Labrador. For the first time in a long time, we have the ability to control our destiny and by staying on course we will capitalize on this opportunity.

My Government is committed to a long-term social and economic growth strategy and will not be blinded or misguided by bright lights, quick fixes and grand schemes.

Making a Difference - The Last Two Years

The last two years have seen My Government embark on a more ambitious agenda.

My Government's philosophy is that it will make a difference in the lives of the people it serves by remaining true to its commitments. A commitment made is a commitment kept.

A Government that is Accessible

My Government has committed to bringing the institutions of government closer to the people so that they can play a more active and beneficial role in the mainstream of life in our province. This can best be achieved by opening up government and increasing our accountability.

We now have in this province a Citizens' Representative and a Child and Youth Advocate. In the coming months, we will see the appointment of the first Information and Privacy Commissioner, when the new *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* becomes law.

We also have the office of a Petroleum Products Pricing Commissioner, which ensures stability and certainty for consumers in petroleum pricing. With the uncertainty in the world, this office is meeting the important objective of providing stability in pricing.

Being Accountable to the People

My Government committed that all departments and agencies would be required to publish annual reports in 2003. In this spring sitting, annual reports for all government departments and boards will be tabled in this Honourable House.

These offices and commitments provide real vehicles of communication and accountability between the people and their government.

A Strong and Secure Economy

My Government reached an agreement for the development of Voisey's Bay in Labrador. This 30-year project, which will contribute an estimated $11 billion to the provincial economy, is a major economic stimulus in our province. The decision to move forward with the development at Voisey's Bay took courage, vision and a determination to find solutions, not obstacles.

My Government has also successfully negotiated our third major offshore oil project, White Rose. The $2.35 billion project now employs over 400 people in St. John's. One of these people is Tony Mercer who graduated from Memorial University with an engineering degree, and after working six years in Houston, has returned to Newfoundland and Labrador. In Marystown, there are now over 300 people working and the workforce in that town will peak at 600 people on this project alone.

With the newly established offshore boundary between Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, our province gains control of 70 per cent of the area that was in dispute between the two provinces. This area, which has been under moratorium for 30 years, will soon be opened to advanced exploration for oil and natural gas.

An Aggressive Social Agenda

My Government recognizes that the challenge of growing the economy must coincide with challenges we face as a just society. My Government can best meet the needs of our people by ensuring that we plan for the future.

My Government implemented a Strategic Social Plan that is the preeminent model of social development in Canada. The plan ensures that policy and program development are based on evidence, reflect partnerships and are designed to strengthen our communities.

Challenged to Measure Up

Through the Strategic Social Plan, My Government envisions government, regions and communities working in partnership to improve the lives of the people of the province. My Government is committed to the completion of a Social Audit in 2003. The next phase of the Audit will soon be released. *From the Ground Up* is a factual report on where we stand as a province using key social and economic indicators.

A government must have the courage to challenge itself; to measure the work it is doing. Through the Social Audit, the first of its kind in Canada, My Government demonstrates again its commitment to the people it serves.

My Government has a new strategic health plan for Newfoundland and Labrador. *Healthier Together* sets out new directions for the health care system over the next five years and will result in higher quality and more accessible and sustainable health care for the people of the province.

The dedication and commitment of provincial public servants in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be critical to My Government's ability to serve the needs of the people of the province. My Government currently has in place 31 public sector contracts; contracts which are fair to employees and affordable to the treasury.

Affordable housing for those most in need is a priority of My Government. In the coming weeks, My Government will enter into a multi-year, multi-million dollar bilateral agreement with the federal government that will stimulate the creation of affordable housing and maintain the existing housing stock for those most in need.

My Government increased the minimum wage twice in 2002, and the current rate of $6.00 per hour is on par with minimum wage rates in the rest of Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Many would say that the last two years constitute a solid record of achievement. For My Government, it represents a good start.

Education - The Foundation for Prosperity

My Government is fiercely determined to build a culture where education is highly valued and where our citizens are among the best educated in the country. All societies that prosper and all governments that reach their goals for social and economic development have one thing in common. It is a strong educational foundation.

Students

It is well established that the first years of learning are critical to future success. My Government is committed to a strong program of pre-school and early childhood development initiatives. One component is Kinderstart, a province-wide, pre-Kindergarten orientation program aimed at preparing children to enter school ready to learn, familiar with the classroom setting and with a head-start in reading.

My Government has set a course to reverse the trend of low literacy and provided the strategic means to become a province with students who are among the best educated in the country.

My Government is also committed to maintaining the best pupil-teacher ratio in Canada, currently at one teacher for every 13.5 students.

National and international testing results verify that our investments in education are paying dividends.

The province's drop-out rate has declined sharply, from 24 per cent in 1991 to 11 per cent in 1999. This represents a remarkable 54 per cent decline over an eight-year period. It speaks to an increased awareness among

young people of the importance of staying in school. It also speaks to the ability of our education system to provide students with the supports they need to succeed at the high school level.

My Government is very concerned about bullying in our schools. Through our new Safe and Caring Schools Action Plan, our children will continue to enjoy one of the safest and most nurturing learning environments in the world.

Increasing achievement in rural Newfoundland and Labrador will be a primary focus of My Government over the next five years.

Substantial progress is being made in the provision of on-line learning opportunities for students in Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly for those students who live in rural areas. Nancy Turner, a student at Holy Cross School in Eastport, is one student who is seeing real benefit in distance education. She says: "Distance education is a valuable part of my high school career, and I am thrilled to be part of something so remarkable".

My Government will place the entire high school curriculum in e-learning format, so that our high school program is available to students anywhere in the province. My Government will ensure equality of opportunity for every student in Newfoundland and Labrador. This will ensure that students are fully prepared to participate at a post-secondary level without disadvantage.

My Government has set an education agenda that has, as its goal, the attainment of student achievement levels in Newfoundland and Labrador that match or exceed the highest performing provinces in Canada. In addition, by 2006, our students will rank among the best in the world and we expect this to be verified in national and international test results. This is a bold objective, but it is one we have made significant progress towards achieving.

Our Educators

If education is a basic tenet of our success as a people, our teachers are a vital link to not only the success of our students but to the success of the province.

Andre Hudson, a chemistry teacher in Grand Falls-Windsor, is one of the teachers making a difference in the lives of our children. As an e-teacher with the recently established Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation, he brings his expertise in that subject area to students in rural and remote parts of the province. This is just one of the innovative ways high calibre teachers and technology can be connected to bring quality learning experiences to students no matter where they live.

My Government is committed to finding new and innovative ways to ensure that teacher resources are used to promote the best possible programming and classroom experience for our children.

In 2000, My Government engaged two prominent educators to study how we could most effectively resource our schools in an era of declining enrolment. The formula subsequently presented in the Sparkes-Williams Ministerial Panel Report represented a fair and equitable means by which to address this issue. That said, the formula has not been fully implemented for the past number of years. As a result, more than half the teaching positions that would have been lost to enrolment decline have been retained in the system.

This investment in additional teachers, beyond that recommended in the allocation formula, will continue to allow schools and school boards to deliver enhanced educational opportunities for our students.

Educational Infrastructure

Over the past five years, My Government has invested more than $170 million in new school construction and upgrading existing schools, with more than $50 million in the past two years alone. This expenditure, made

possible by school reform, has seen the construction of 23 new schools in communities such as Blaketown, Roddickton and Plum Point, and 49 major renovation projects. This represents the largest capital investment in our schools in the history of the province.

My Government will make the necessary investments to ensure that, within five years, every school from Nain to St. John's is brought up to a level that meets or exceeds national standards.

My Government is proud of its accomplishment that computers are readily available in schools to all students, regardless of where they live. Our next commitment is to link every classroom to the Internet.

My Government has agreed to make a further $5 million investment in broadband infrastructure in the province, through the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation. We are awaiting confirmation of partnership commitments from the federal government and the private sector.

Supports and Services

My Government established a study group with NAPE and CUPE to examine the hours of work issue for secretarial, janitorial and maintenance workers. The report was publicly released earlier this year. My Government is studying the report and will work towards implementation with our union partners.

Textbooks are currently provided free of charge to students in Kindergarten to Grade 8. My Government currently provides a 40 per cent subsidy for textbooks in Grades 9 through 12. My Government will explore ways and means to further reduce the cost of textbooks in the high school program.

My Government's education agenda is ambitious and forward-thinking. It addresses our students, our teachers and the supports they require to achieve and excel. My Government believes that, if our children are to reap the benefits of our vision and promises, we must be willing to sow the seeds today.

Post-Secondary Education: An Achievable Goal

My Government believes that students should graduate with the skills and knowledge they need to become productive citizens. My Government is committed to making education at the post-secondary level accessible to all who choose to pursue it. My Government is keeping that commitment.

Lowering Tuition

Today, more than 80 per cent of high school graduates in this province pursue a post-secondary education. In support of this, My Government committed to reducing tuition at Memorial University of Newfoundland by 25 per cent. We are keeping that commitment.

With a 20 per cent reduction over the past two years, tuition rates in our province are the lowest in the country. Tuition rates at Memorial will decrease by a further five per cent this coming September. We stand alone as the only province in the country that is lowering tuition for the benefit of our students.

Over the past four years, My Government was instrumental in the implementation of a tuition freeze at the College of the North Atlantic and the Marine Institute, making current tuition rates among the lowest in the country.

Lowering Debt

My Government has made changes to the student aid program aimed at reducing student debt and making post-secondary education more affordable. The measures include new debt reduction grants and enhanced interest relief, so students can shed their debt faster.

For example, a student who borrows at the maximum level of $275 per week for the length of their degree program is eligible for $15,000 in debt reduction. This means that students who borrow at the maximum level have no provincial student debt, and amounts to a 40 per cent reduction in a student's overall debt load.

With these measures to ensure low tuition rates, and with a revamped student aid program, My Government is making affordable post-secondary education available to the greatest possible number of students.

Youth Opportunities Newfoundland and Labrador

Youth out-migration, youth employment, student debt, rural revitalization and business expansion are all challenges that My Government is addressing. This year, My Government will commence a Youth Opportunities Newfoundland and Labrador program to provide incentives for post-secondary graduates burdened by student debt to stay and work in the province after graduation. The finalization of program details will be a participatory process with students and other stakeholders in a roundtable convened for this purpose.

The All-Important First Job

My Government will also provide incentives to employers who hire cooperative work term students, and to those who hire new graduates in their field of study.

Youth Opportunities Newfoundland and Labrador will give graduating students a helping hand as they begin their professional careers and will encourage them to remain part of the social fabric of their communities and their province.

Quality, Accessible and Sustainable Health Care

My Government is committed to providing a quality health and community services system that improves the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. My Government's resolve to meet this commitment is shown in *Healthier Together: A Strategic Health Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*.

This five-year strategic health plan sets out the major long-term goals, and identifies the objectives, actions and targets, by which My Government will be measured. The directions outlined in the plan were a result of extensive consultations with the public and key stakeholders.

Delivering a Sustainable System

Each year, My Government spends $1.5 billion, or 42 cents of every program dollar, on health care. My Government increased health care spending by 50 per cent since 1994/95. People, however, deserve more than increased health care spending; they also deserve a guarantee of excellent care.

Providing a Quality System

In keeping with My Government's commitment, a Health Charter will be released shortly. The Charter's purpose is to outline what people can expect from the health and community services system, and an understanding of our own individual responsibility in achieving optimal health and well-being. The Charter will reflect public input received during the current consultation process.

Healthy People

Wellness is an overarching theme of My Government's strategic health plan. To improve the health status of the people of the province, a wellness strategy is being developed. Four key areas have been identified for immediate work. They are health promotion, injury and illness prevention, health protection, and child and youth

development. My Government will take advice and guidance on our wellness strategy from the recently created Provincial Wellness Advisory Council, chaired by Dr. Catherine Donovan.

Physical activity is a major health determinant. Research indicates that 60 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are not active enough to achieve health benefits. To address this problem, My Government established a coalition of individuals from the fields of sport, recreation, health and education to develop a provincial strategy that will increase the physical activity levels of the people of the province.

Tobacco control initiatives continue to be a key element of our wellness agenda. My Government's Teen Tobacco Team has been instrumental in promoting the "stop smoking" message. Since 2000, smoking rates of those aged 15-19 in Newfoundland and Labrador have dropped from 28 per cent to 22 per cent. My Government is committed to achieving an even greater reduction in smoking rates, particularly for those in their early teens. My Government will not rest until 100 per cent of teens stop smoking.

My Government believes it is time the tobacco industry accepted responsibility for the negative impact its product has on the lives of individuals. To this end, My Government has announced its plan to recover the enormous health costs associated with tobacco use through the courts.

Mental Health Strategy

My Government also recognizes that a new strategy is needed in the area of mental health. It is the lack of community-based services that is most obvious. My Government will formulate a mental health strategy leading to a more comprehensive set of mental health services.

Caring for Autistic Children

My Government has announced a further investment of $1.88 million over three years for autism services in the province. Early intensive intervention services will be offered to pre-school aged children who are currently waiting

for the service. This increased funding will also address the anticipated demand for new referrals to the programs as they arise.

Accessibility for All Citizens: A Team-Based Approach

My Government's strategic health plan sets out a new direction for primary health care as the central focus of the delivery of health and community services. This represents a new direction for primary health care: a team-based, interdisciplinary approach where physicians, nurses and other health professionals cooperate in providing services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

My Government's goal is to ensure that every region of the province can avail of appropriate primary health care services on a 24 hour a day, seven day a week basis, within five years.

Enhancing the availability of diagnostic care, treatment services and equipment is critical to reducing waiting times and ensuring the quality of our health care system. My Government will make new investments, including support for specialized staff training and equipment, which will improve access to diagnostic services.

These initiatives demonstrate My Government's leadership in ensuring that our health care system provides quality and accessible care to the people of the province.

Opportunity and Prosperity

A challenge we face as a province is the belief amongst some, that Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be a place of little or no opportunity for our people, particularly for our youth. This defeatist attitude, and the myth that there are no opportunities in our province, is being dispelled every day by citizens of our province who are making a difference.

Small Business Grows the Economy

Small businesses continue to make a real difference in our economy. Almost 95 per cent of all businesses in the province are small businesses. There are more than 20,000 small businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador today, creating 80 per cent of all new jobs in our economy.

It is people like Lindy Rideout, owner of Sea Knife Kayaks in Cottlesville, who are reversing the trends of the past and showing that a strong economy provides jobs and opportunities for our people to stay in our province. His company is one of the largest kayak producers in Atlantic Canada. To market his high-end kayaks, the company has opened an office in Ontario and is setting up distributors across Atlantic Canada. This kind of thinking and creativity demonstrates that today's rural Newfoundland and Labrador is securing its future.

My Government has strengthened the overall small business environment in recent years to encourage growth and new jobs in this vitally important sector of our economy. This remains a priority for My Government. New measures and initiatives will be announced in the upcoming Budget to build an even stronger environment to help small businesses grow and succeed in all parts of our province.

Regional Economic Development

My Government is committed to building stronger regions and stronger communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. It is critically important that all regions of the province share in our economic progress and that the overall economy develops more fully on a regional basis. The 20 Regional Economic Development Boards are providing leadership on this front and My Government intends to ensure they remain an effective partner in moving the economy forward.

The Rural Development Associations throughout the province also play an extremely important role in community economic development. My Government values their contribution and is committed to strengthening their capacity to help implement the strategic regional development plans that have been prepared by the Regional Economic Development Boards.

Leading Economic Growth

Major Canadian banks, and organizations like the Conference Board of Canada, have declared our economy the fastest growing in the country. Our GDP growth has nearly tripled from 2001. More than 60 per cent of the 27,000 jobs created in the past several years have been outside the St. John's area.

A Climate of Investment

My Government has been successful in creating a climate for investment, jobs and growth that is showing a positive impact. My Government has an aggressive plan to achieve this objective. It is the Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth. It is, in large measure, a rural agenda reaffirming the commitment of My Government to rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It is working.

It is clear that we are on the right track in this province.

Three Priority Sectors

My Government's Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth identified a number of priority sectors that could achieve great levels of growth if given the proper support. Three of these are tourism, aquaculture and information technology.

Tourism

Newfoundland and Labrador is emerging as a tourist destination of choice. Our tourism sector has grown dramatically over the past decade, with marked, sustained growth over the last five years. Tourism continues to be a priority sector in My Government's economic plan and our approach is paying dividends. Spending by visitors in the province in 2002 reached an estimated $304 million, an increase of 27 per cent since 1998. When you add resident tourist expenditures to non-resident expenditures, these are estimated to be over $620 million annually.

In December 2002, My Government announced the creation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Marketing Council, which is co-chaired by government with Roger Jamieson, a tourism industry leader. This represents a new opportunity for better industry involvement in tourism marketing. It is reflective of the mature state of the tourism industry, builds on the tourism momentum of recent years and allows industry and government to work together more closely in promoting the province as a tourism destination.

Aquaculture

The fishery endures as a cornerstone of our economy and our heritage. My Government remains steadfast in its commitment that the fishery should be a proud and viable part of our future. Our diversified fishery is reaching a record $1 billion in value again this year.

Aquaculture has become an important part of that sector and the economy of rural Newfoundland and Labrador. The Aquaculture Strategic Plan, developed by industry and My Government, has facilitated a focused effort to industry development. It concentrates on four established species: Atlantic salmon, steelhead trout, blue mussels and Atlantic cod.

Since 1999, the export value of the aquaculture industry has risen 13 per cent. It reached $20.5 million in 2002. Blue mussel production reached 1,700 tonnes in 2002, an increase of 18 per cent over the previous year. It is entrepreneurs like Juan Roberts, who produced 1.4 million pounds of mussels at his farm in Triton last year, who are making the aquaculture industry grow.

My Government's $1 million contribution towards construction in Bay Roberts of the first commercial cod hatchery in North America will make us world leaders in egg-to-plate aquaculture technology.

Information Technology

The information technology sector averaged more than 10 per cent annual growth from 1992 to 1997, and grew by more than 25 per cent in each of 1998, 1999 and 2000. Today, in our province, we have more than 200 IT firms and 4,000 IT professionals, generating $600 million in business around the world. The information technology sector remains a significant generator of employment and we are proud of the contribution this industry continues to make to our economy.

My Government looks forward to partnering with Aliant over the next three years on a $1.5 million Near Shore Development Initiative to aggressively establish the province as a recognized centre for information technology development.

Business Attraction Agency

The attraction of new investment, new companies and new industries to our province is an important part of My Government's plan for economic growth and job creation. In 2003, My Government will establish a new Business Attraction Agency for the province to capture growing national and international investor interest in

Newfoundland and Labrador, working in partnership with the business community and regional and municipal economic development organizations.

Labour Market Development Strategy

Newfoundland and Labrador, like other jurisdictions nationally and internationally, is being challenged with labour market issues such as changing demographics and skill shortages. My Government is continuing its work with the Labour Market Development Council, a government-established advisory group of employers, labour, post-secondary and student representatives, to develop a provincial labour market development strategy. This strategy will be designed to assist in responding to current and future labour market challenges and to strategically position the province in an increasingly global economy.

Ex-Patriate Labour Registration Desk

Local employers say that, more frequently than ever before, they cannot find employees in our province to satisfy new or growing operations. Many of our people also wish to return home to work. My Government is interested in facilitating the return of these skilled workers by establishing an ex-patriate labour registration desk, to match Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who live outside the province and want to return home, with employers who can offer them a job.

Labrador

The richness of Labrador's resources is well known, and the prospects for that part of the province shine bright. In order to provide a greater level of understanding and service to the people of Labrador, My Government has, for the first time in its history, two members representing Labrador in the Cabinet.

My Government will continue to work with the people of Labrador to promote the development of Labrador's resources in an environmentally responsible manner. And it will do so with the best interests of the people of Labrador, and the province generally, foremost in our minds.

My Government will complete Phase III of the Trans Labrador Highway between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Cartwright. While this commitment is not conditional on federal funding, My Government has proposed a partnership approach to the Government of Canada and would welcome federal participation in this important project.

My Government has been able to reconfigure the Labrador Marine Service so that communities on the North Coast have a more frequent ferry service than they ever had before. For the people in Labrador West and the Happy Valley-Goose Bay area traveling on the ferry to the Island via Cartwright, costs and travel time will be reduced. Southern Labrador will become the main transportation route for entry into and out of Labrador and connections to the rest of the province, which will in turn provide a great deal of potential for future economic growth in this region.

Partnerships for Success

My Government believes in working in partnership with people throughout the province. This approach demonstrates our commitment to dialogue and openness. It is a way to ensure that the people's priorities remain government's priorities.

Strategic Partnership Initiative

In January 2002, My Government announced a Strategic Partnership Initiative of government, business and labour. The objective of the Partnership is to advance the province's overall economic agenda. An early priority established by the Partnership was to identify and address key issues that need to be tackled together by government, business and labour to improve the province's productivity and competitive position in an

increasingly global economy. My Government is committed to working with business and labour as equal partners in dealing with these and other strategic challenges to advance our economy.

Community Partnerships

My Government acknowledges the valuable role the Premier's Council on Social Development plays in providing advice on key social policy issues, most recently the new *Income and Employment Support Act*.

Last year, My Government asked the Premier's Council to provide advice on ways to strengthen and develop the voluntary, community-based sector. The Premier's Council recently submitted its recommendations and, in the coming weeks, My Government will be announcing a comprehensive action plan focusing on how government and the voluntary, community-based sector can work more effectively together to achieve our common goals.

Partnership with Women

While gains have been made towards gender equity, more work in this area still needs to be done. My Government's commitment to advancing the status of women is reflected in its establishment of a Women's Policy Office to provide an essential link between women and government decision makers, and to facilitate gender inclusive policy development. It is also reflected in the sustained support of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and Women's Centres throughout the province. These commitments will continue.

The problem of reducing violence is not one which government can solve on its own. My Government established the Violence Prevention Initiative, a government-community partnership, to work with key groups on a regional basis and together, to make communities safer for everyone. Through this Initiative, My Government has committed funding through fiscal year 2004/05 to improve coordination of services for victims, to increase public awareness and to support community mobilization on issues related to violence.

Partnership with Aboriginal Peoples

My Government's relationship with the Aboriginal people of this province has never been stronger. This past year saw the conclusion of agreements with the Innu and Inuit to enable the Voisey's Bay development to proceed, in a manner consistent with their priorities and objectives.

Negotiations with the Government of Canada and the Labrador Inuit Association on the first land claims and self-government agreement in this province will be completed in the coming months. Progress is also being made on the Innu Nation land claim. It is My Government's sincere hope that, with a fresh start, the Mushuau Innu will find a better life in Natuashish than the one they left behind in Davis Inlet.

Partnership with Municipalities

Strong local governance is essential to the social and economic growth of communities. My Government will continue to expand and enhance the infrastructure which is so essential to the growth and health of our communities. Communities throughout the province will see an investment in municipal infrastructure exceeding $300 million over a three-year period. Through its Debt Relief Program, My Government has reduced the debt load of many rural communities by a total of $47 million and created the financial stability for continued growth.

My Government has committed $31 million to the clean-up of the St. John's harbour.

Democratic Reform

My Government believes in basic democratic principles that maximize the opportunities for inclusiveness and fairness in the electoral process. Public service is an honourable profession. My Government is dedicated to strengthening and building the integrity of our public institutions.

Campaign Financing

My Government plans to strengthen the rules pertaining to campaign financing in advance of the next general election. Legislation will be introduced shortly to provide for limits on campaign contributions to a party or candidate during an election campaign. We will provide for limits on third party spending if the third party is acting independently of a registered party or candidate. The rules will be more transparent with respect to the amounts which individuals and parties can spend during an election.

Size of Cabinet

The *Electoral Boundaries Act* establishes the review process which must be undertaken every ten years respecting electoral districts. Later this year, My Government will receive a report from a commission setting out recommendations concerning the number of seats for this Honourable House.

My Government is of the view that the size of the Cabinet should be a fixed percentage of the total number of seats in the House of Assembly. Following the determination of the number of seats, My Government commits to a Cabinet size of no more than one-third of the number of districts.

Election Dates

After full public consultation, My Government will introduce legislation to require that provincial elections be held on a set date every four years. This will provide a greater degree of stability and certainty in the electoral process.

Our Relationship with Ottawa

It is very clear that our relationship with the federal government is an issue of great interest and concern to the people of the province. While the province is a partner in the Canadian federation, My Government shares the

people's view that we are not truly an equal partner. For a partnership to be truly equal there must be respect on both sides.

Unfortunately, at this time, the level of indifference, disinterest and disrespect towards provinces is increasing. This was quite obvious during the recent First Ministers' Meeting on health care. It was also clearly evident in recent decisions taken with respect to divestiture of the port facility in Stephenville, and the virtual closure of the weather forecasting office in Gander. The federal government has failed to respect the people of this province and this must change.

All-Party Committee on Cod Fisheries

Last November, without any consultation or warning, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans announced through the media it was contemplating closing cod fisheries beginning with the 2003 season. In response to a resolution passed in the House of Assembly, an emergency meeting took place in Ottawa on December 2, 2002 resulting in the formation of an historic All-Party Committee to present a united provincial position on this serious issue. My Government is pleased with the cooperation and collaboration on this matter.

My Government calls on the federal government to respond positively to the recommendations contained in the report of the All-Party Committee, which was publicly released on March 17th, to help rebuild and protect the Northern and Gulf cod stocks, and to assist those who depend on these renewable fish resources for their livelihood.

Foreign Overfishing

The issue of foreign overfishing and the exploitation of our fishery resources is one of profound significance to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. My Government has established the Provincial Advisory Council on Foreign Overfishing to provide advice on how we can work to resolve the issues related to overfishing on the Nose and Tail of the Grand Banks. We have proposed the concept of custodial management to the federal government.

My Government will continue to press the federal government to live up to its responsibility of protecting our fisheries resources.

All-Party Symposium on Equalization

The leadership of all provincial and federal elected officials in this province is required to effect a change in the relationship between Newfoundland and Labrador and the federal government. To this end, My Government will expand on the success of the All-Party approach initiated to respond to the troubled state of the Northern and Gulf cod fisheries by convening the first annual symposium of all Members of this Honourable House and all federal Members of the House of Commons and Senate from Newfoundland and Labrador.

This will be an annual event, held each fall, to tackle a priority issue of importance to the people of the province. The issue My Government is proposing for the first symposium will be Equalization, a timely one given the review of the program which is scheduled to be completed in 2004. Business and labour will also be invited to participate in this symposium on Equalization through the Strategic Partnership Initiative.

Lower Churchill Development

Canada's increasing need for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions raises the importance of the Government of Canada's potential role in facilitating development of the Lower Churchill. Now that the federal government has ratified the Kyoto Protocol, My Government will continue to explore with Ottawa, over the next several months, the role which this clean, renewable energy project could play in reducing Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

My Government remains firmly committed to developing the Lower Churchill with partners that are committed to maximizing the returns, benefits and opportunities for our people.

Canada/Newfoundland and Labrador Economic Development Board

As of March 31, 2003, the last of the existing federal-provincial, cost-shared comprehensive economic development agreements will expire in Newfoundland and Labrador and the other Atlantic provinces. My Government has proposed to the federal government a new model for economic development programming in Newfoundland and Labrador, namely the establishment of a Canada/Newfoundland and Labrador Economic Development Board.

This Board would bring together most of ACOA's provincial office and most of the business lines of the Department of Industry, Trade and Rural Development. This pilot project would have the goal of eliminating the overlap and duplication which currently exists, and pooling the collective resources of the two orders of government in support of common economic development objectives and priorities.

During the period of time needed to fully operationalize this model, My Government has proposed to the Government of Canada that the current Comprehensive Economic Development Agreement be extended by one year to March 31, 2004. This would allow for an orderly transition.

My Government remains convinced that much more can be achieved if the voice of Newfoundland and Labrador is better respected in Ottawa.

Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening our Place in Canada

A centrepiece of last year's Throne Speech was the announcement of the Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada. The degree of public interest and involvement in the Commission's work to date speaks volumes about the importance of this initiative. My Government looks forward to the final report of the Commission by June 30th, which, in many ways, will chart the future course for Newfoundland and Labrador.

The People's Congress

In recognition of the importance of this initiative to the people of the province, My Government will organize a People's Congress within 60 days of receiving the Commission's report. We will bring together elected federal and provincial officials from all parties, municipal leaders, Aboriginal leaders, representatives of the social, business and labour sectors, with representation from women, youth and seniors. The intended outcome will be an action plan flowing from the recommendations of the Commission report.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

My Government will continue to engage the people of Newfoundland and Labrador as we advance our agenda, as we further our ability to seize the opportunities before us to control our destiny. The strong spirit and determination of the people of the province carries us through challenges and leads to prosperity. It will serve us well, as together we build the new Newfoundland and Labrador.

A Vision for this Province...A Plan We Will Achieve

My Government's agenda is large and ambitious.

It is an agenda that is practical and affordable. It demonstrates a government of energy, of vision, of ideas, and of leadership.

It is an agenda for the people. An agenda to be delivered in partnership with the people.

It is because of My Government's commitment to a structured long-term approach to strategic policy planning that it is able to govern effectively and deliver on its commitments.

While My Government recognizes that the challenges are great, it also recognizes that our opportunities are even greater.

My Government believes that together we are building an education system that will enable our children to seize any opportunity that the future will offer.

My Government believes that together we are building a health care system that provides quality and accessible health care that is sustainable.

My Government believes that together we are building a society that allows people to have the quality of life they want and deserve.

My Government is driven by a firm commitment to our children that the province they inherit from our generation will be a better one.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Estimates of expenditure will be laid before you in due course and you will be asked to grant supply to Her Majesty.

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence this new Session.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.